

THE WASHINGTON STAR (GREEN LINE)
4 December 1975

Garry Wills

Shabby appointment may help

Sen. Church says he's afraid that the choice of a partisan like George Bush to head the CIA will undermine the professional spirit of that agency. Odd, isn't it? Church has been pretending to fight that spirit in his intelligence hearings, and how he wants to restore it.

That tends to confirm the general opinion in Washington that, between the two intelligence hearings going on, Sen. Church's committee has the staff but not the will and Rep. Pike's committee has the will but not the staff.

Church went on to say that he had no objection to a good Republican in the CIA post, just so long as he has not been a national chairman for his party — and he gave Elliot Richardson's name as an example. That's pretty odd, too.

Mr. Richardson came out of the Watergate scandal like a white knight. But those of us who had seen him run errands for Nixon in Cabinet post after Cabinet post wondered, even then, whether his reputation was earned. Nixon did not choose his attorney general lightly, in that period of turmoil.

Now we can read, in the special prosecutor's final report, that Richardson tried to hem in Archibald Cox, and only when Cox stood firm did Richardson realize he would have to fall honorably with Cox or he would fall farther down, and dishonorably, with Nixon himself.

That is not much of a recommendation for the CIA

post — or for any other post. Richardson lent his appearance of rectitude to Nixon in every way he could, before saving his own skin at the last minute. Those who talk about Donald Rumsfeld's ambition have not begun to plumb that quality's depth until they see Richardson in action.

But what about Bush? His brief service as national chairman during Watergate involved nothing nearly as compromising as Richardson's aborted efforts to help Nixon from the Justice Department. Indeed, the stress on Bush's chairmanship is entirely misplaced. A more revealing episode was his service as U.N. ambassador during the time of Nixon's opening to China.

The right wing was never on solid ground than in charging that Nixon betrayed a thousand promises to Taiwan, to Chiang Kai-shek, and to the old China lobby. To deflate this charge, Nixon sent Bush to vociferate against Taiwan's expulsion from the U.N.

Bush acted too well to keep his reputation among sharp observers. If he really felt as deeply for Taiwan as he pretended, he would not have lent himself to a charade that advanced Nixon's wooing of the People's Republic. He was not there to help Chiang. He was sent on a diversion to block some of the right wing's early criticism of détente.

The play worked as well as could be expected. When Bush, mission accomplish-

ed, was moved from the U.N. to the national committee, William F. Buckley (the educated man's Howard Cosell) wrote: "It crossed the mind fleetingly that Bush was being punished, rather belatedly in the last weeks of 1972, for having failed to achieve the desired result in the General Assembly in the fall of 1971 on the China debate."

Mr. Buckley rejected the fleeting thought, but on irrelevant grounds; he never hints to his readers that Bush accomplished exactly the desired result — which was to blunt in some measure the protests of men like Mr. Buckley, who could swallow the Bush effort as a sincere one.

Sen. Church regrets that a known partisan should become head of the CIA. He misses the point, at several levels. Bush's offense is not that he served honorably as Republican national chairman, but that he served cynically as part of Nixon's trickiest move at the U.N. Thus it is true that Bush has no claim to nonpartisan professionalism — and that is why I hope he gets confirmed as head of the CIA. The CIA's ethos of gentlemen freelancers needs to be undermined, and a shabby appointment will help.

Rep. Michael Harrington told me, when we discussed the Church and Pike committees: "They cannot bring down the CIA. Those guys will have to bring themselves down." Perhaps President Ford, without knowing it, has begun that process with his nomination of Bush.